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Daily Highlights

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WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Security Council discusses Secretary-General's position paper on occasion of fiftieth anniversary of United Nations; extends sympathy to Government and people of Japan on loss of life and damage caused by Monday's earthquake.

+ Secretary-General has meetings with German Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Minister of Defence in Bonn; discusses Germany's role in United Nations peace-keeping operations.

+ Special Representative Brahimi to take up residence in Haiti tomorrow; UNMIH Force Commander meets with United Nations personnel in Port-au-Prince.

+ Preparatory Committee for World Social Summit discusses draft declaration on poverty elimination, job creation and social development.

+ UNRWA and Saudi Fund for Development review use of $20 million contribution to Peace Implementation Programme for West Bank and Gaza.

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The Security Council met today to discuss the Secretary-General's position paper on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, a supplement to his 1992 report, "An Agenda for Peace". On behalf of the Council, President Emilio J. Cardenas extended deep sympathy to the Government and people of Japan in connection with Monday's earthquake. He expressed shock and sorrow at the great loss of life and material damage suffered.

The United Kingdom said it could wholeheartedly endorse many of the proposals in the Secretary-General's position paper. There should be greater coordination within the United Nations system to identify potential crises and a greater willingness to address them early, before they escalated into armed conflict. However, preventive action would not always be effective, and a large number of United Nations peace-keepers would continue to be needed. A clear line had to be drawn between peace-keeping and peace-enforcement.

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Peace-keeping was most likely to succeed when it was strictly impartial and based upon the consent of the parties.

Speaking on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned countries, the representative of Indonesia noted that the Secretary-General's position paper was relatively silent on the General Assembly's role in contributing to the maintenance of international peace and security. He stressed that only sustained efforts to resolve underlying social, economic, cultural and humanitarian problems could achieve peace on a durable foundation. The United Nations must convey a new vision to the world, and fulfil its commitment to development.

China stressed that the Security Council must strictly abide by the Charter when engaged in preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping. Particular attention should be given to the principle of respect for State sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs. Disputes should be settled through such peaceful means as good offices, mediation and negotiation. Seeking rapid solutions through military actions or other enforcement measures was not only politically undesirable, but would sharpen contradictions and cause long-term damage. China supported a more active and effective role for the General Assembly in maintaining international peace and security and in related areas.

The United States representative said the United Nations must learn from the 21 peace-keeping operations established since 1988. Perhaps the most important lesson was that an operation inside a country faced greater demands than one separating hostile States. She stressed the need for rigorous decision-making in considering whether, and how, to initiate an operation. In the past year, the Council had asked tough questions about the cost, mandate, scope, risk and duration of proposed operations. The goal was to ensure that each operation had a clear and realistic objective, that peace-keepers were equipped properly and that money was not wasted. The new policy was working, and had resulted in fewer and smaller new operations, and better management of existing ones. She added that there should be a willingness to delay the start of an operation until the parties accepted, and observed for a trial period, military and political steps towards a negotiated settlement.

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Continuing his visit to Germany, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali today met with the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Helmut Schaefer. They discussed ways to strengthen the United Nations in the fields of diplomacy and peace-keeping, assistance to the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, and disarmament issues, including the proliferation of anti-personnel mines. Mr. Schaefer sat in at that meeting for Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel, who was ill.

The Secretary General later met with the German Defence Minister, Volker Rühe. Their discussion focused on United Nations peace-keeping operations, and Germany's role in them.

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Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi will travel to Haiti tomorrow to take up residence there, according to a United Nations spokesman. The Force Commander of the United Nations Mission in Haiti (UNMIH), Major-General Joseph Kinzer, arrived in the country yesterday.

Major-General Kinzer had a series of meetings with United Nations personnel today, and was scheduled to meet with the Special Representative tomorrow, the spokesman continued. He would also meet with various Haitian officials, and visit Gonaives and Cap-Haitien, in the coming days.

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The Preparatory Committee for the World Summit for Social Development has been discussing a draft declaration which would express the political commitment of governments to eliminate poverty, create jobs and promote social development. At a working group meeting yesterday, the Committee focused on the section on "principles and goals", and on the first of nine commitments in the draft, on the establishment of an environment conducive to social development. The draft declaration and a draft programme of action to implement it will be submitted to the Summit, which will be held in Copenhagen in March.

During the discussion on principles and goals, speakers discussed whether past actions relating to social progress should be addressed in the declaration, or if its sole focus should be the vision for the future. The representative of Slovenia said that past mistakes of governments should be admitted, while pledges should be made to avoid creating obstacles to social development. The representative of Canada said the principles and goals for the present and future should not refer to the past. Committee Chairman Juan Somavia (Chile) said the declaration should reflect the fact that past realities had led to the convening of the Social Summit.

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The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) Commissioner-General, Ilter Türkmen, met with a delegation from the Saudi Fund for Development in Vienna on Monday. They reviewed the Agency's progress in implementing projects valued at $20 million in the West Bank and Gaza using Saudi assistance for the Palestinian people.

Project funds earmarked for Gaza include support for upgrading health services, constructing and providing equipment for UNRWA schools and shelter rehabilitation. In the West Bank, funds are being used to upgrade health centres and UNRWA schools, and to support health institutions in Jerusalem. Saudi Arabia's contribution of $20 million is the largest from a single donor for UNRWA's Peace Implementation Programme.

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